

Trading Incubator Entrepreneurial Leadership Journey

This entrepreneurial experience of 10 Township Community Entrepreneurs started in 2024. The African proverb go fast, go alone; go far, go together. Sanlam approached the University of the Western Cape to transform their old post office.

The answer to that request was based on reality of township entrepreneurs who lack quality business development support, guidance in terms of coaching and mentoring, access to affordable infrastructure and access to market.

Township entrepreneurs face risk on daily basis- gang violence, extortion -pay gangsters money to operate, lack of technology and absence of eco-system support. To make matters worse the clientele of community entrepreneurs is not prepared to come to their place of operations due to risk of theft and safety.

The dream of relocating their business outside of their area of residence is too costly due to high rental cost and access to infrastructure.

The above influenced my decision to respond Sanlam to transform their post office into a Trading incubator. At the end of our entrepreneurial graduation program, I was asked a simple question: Where can we find a market for our product or service, how can we become more visible.

This made me realize that training is not enough we need to create a community of practice and support beyond the training. We need to be intentional to provide practical pathways for community entrepreneurs to industry networks, new markets, affordable infrastructure but more importantly pathway to personal growth, hope and acknowledgement.

The launch of the trading incubator on 8 October 2024 the first of its kind connected to a University and blue chip company. This was start of entrepreneurial experience for a township entrepreneur - from township to G20.

A first for South African universities

The University of the Western Cape is committed to building an equitable and dynamic society. The establishment of the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI) in 2012 was an extension of the UWC mission to contribute to the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and income inequality. Over a 10-year period the CEI has positioned itself as an expert provider of cutting-edge business development support and customized mentoring and coaching support during and after incubation. The Trading Incubator is unique as the first initiative of its kind linked to a university solely focused on providing a gateway to market access and wrap-around support for community SMMEs

The Entrepreneurship Trading Incubator is unique as the first initiative of its kind linked to a university. By providing township SMMEs with physical trading spaces in the 2nd CBD of the Western Cape , Bellville's central business district, this project addresses key barriers to business growth, such as market access and mentorship. This partnership aligns with UWC motto, "A place of quality, a place to grow. From hope to action through knowledge".

Supporting sustainable job creation through SMMEs

Small businesses are critical to South Africa's economic future. The National Development Plan projects that by 2030, 90% of all new jobs will be created by small businesses, placing SMMEs at the heart of job creation and long-term growth.

Paul Hanratty, CEO of Sanlam, says, "SMMEs are vital to driving sustainable job creation in South Africa. Through the Incubator, we are not only providing township businesses with access to markets but also contributing to the future growth of our economy."

This impactful initiative seeks to provide a solution to the challenges often faced by small and medium enterprises (SMMEs) with a lack of access to the market.

Inclusive economic growth at the heart of the initiative

The Incubator is part of UWC's broader mission to stimulate inclusive economic growth. It targets financial inclusion across gender, race, and age, with a special focus on black-owned businesses.

Manie Regal, UWC's executive director of finance, adds: "This incubator is not just about boosting small businesses; it's about creating a path to economic empowerment for marginalized communities.

Mentor Support and Coaching

The reason for the set-up of the incubator is to bring in township businesses who are struggling to get to customers in the CBD and to connect them with customers outside of the township.

We build the entrepreneur's confidence to network, the confidence to believe in oneself, the entrepreneur's confidence to stand on a stage and present his/her business successfully.

Opening Remarks from Township Entrepreneur

Lisakhanya Gelekeja, co-founder at Comfort Support, said they were grateful for the space as his father, Siphiso, had been selling beds for more than 20 years from their house in Belhar.

Importance of Network Support

Community entrepreneurs lack visibility. We secured a partnership with Tygervalley to allow Hub entrepreneurs to exhibit their products. The result 1st and 3rd prize winners Athenkosi and Fatima was Hub entrepreneurs.

Unknown to Athenkosi this was a major step towards his journey to G20

Athenkosi Gexa of Truth Gexa Designs (middle), Haroldene Tshienda of Shofar Books (right), and Fatima Davids of Corpchem Chemicals (left) were recognised for their remarkable contributions to the local business community. These entrepreneurs embody the spirit of innovation and resilience that the Bellville Business Expo celebrates each year.

Warren Hewitt, Chief Executive Officer of the Greater Tygerberg Partnership (GTP), highlighted the event's success: "This year's Bellville Business Expo exceeded our expectations, showcasing the remarkable resilience and innovation within our local business community. The turnout not only underscored the significant impact that SMMEs have on our region's economy but also demonstrated their collective readiness for growth. It's inspiring to witness how events like this foster collaboration and create opportunities that benefit everyone involved. By connecting these businesses with invaluable resources and access to new markets, we are empowering them to thrive and contribute even more to the economic landscape of Bellville and beyond."

The event was expertly hosted by veteran radio personality Kevin Abbot, with a lineup of distinguished speakers that included Alderman James Vos, Mayoral Committee Member for Economic Growth; Warren Hewitt, CEO of the Greater Tygerberg Partnership; and Tanya Heimann from Tyger Valley Centre.

Athenkosi from Phillippi East

Athenkosi grew up in a Township raised by a single mother. He completed my Grade 12 in

2013. In 2015 I studied Electrical Engineering Heavy Current completed 2016. Worked in various retail companies after he graduated unable to find a job in the field he studied. He taught himself how to cut fabrics and make his own clothing. In 2020 he started fashion designer clothing brand known as Truth Gexa Designs (Pty)Lty

News on TV states that last night 16 January "Police are investigating a shooting incident in Marikana that claimed the lives of seven people, one woman and six men aged between 30 and 50."

Phillippi East, a large urban and semi-rural area in Cape Town's Cape Flats region, which is plagued by gang-related violence, with police statistics showing that 2,104 murders were reported to police stations in Cape Flats in the first nine months of 2025.

Despite these daily challenges with the support of fellow entrepreneurs Athenkosi stayed focused on changing his future for himself and his family.

Fast vs Far

I met Athenkosi in 2020 when he started his business. I saw his determination despite the competitiveness of the clothing sector in the townships to bring a unique value proposition to his target market. His tagline " Let your result speak for itself"

How do we track and support community entrepreneurs beyond training? Strive to build relationships beyond the training room.

Partnership and eco-system approach are critical to network building for the entrepreneurs. Sanlam approach CEI to nominate one of the Trading Hub entrepreneurs to manufacture a branded product for the G20. I nominated Athenkosi due to his entrepreneurial behaviour to always avail himself as speaker to inspire other likeminded individuals and UWC students.

This resulted in a contract to supply 500 bucket heads for Sanlam to the value of R160 000. This excludes the funds for his travel and accommodation to Johannesburg-Sandton. The benefit for Sanlam was the presence of local township business showcasing Sanlam's commitment to support the empowerment of community businesses. Furthermore, Sanlam was the only corporate at G20 with black African entrepreneur exhibiting.

Sales for 5 months in 2nd year exceeding annual sales in first year of operation

Sales from September 2025 to January 2026

Name and Surname	Business Name	September	October	November	December	January	Total
Athenkosi Gexa	Truth Gexa Designs	R 4 500	R180 047.50	R27 300	R32 000	R 39 160	R283 007.50
Fatima Davids	CorpChem	R 1 000	R1 200	R1000	R1 500	R 2 500	R7 200
Ricardo Jonker	Nuts for Biltong	R 4 620	R3 460	R4 270	R0	R 7 310	R19 660
Lisakhanya Gelekeja	Comfort Support	R 40 062.85	R14 114	R4 400	R4 400	R 3 830	R66 806.85
Vanessa Cookson	Brown Girl Kreations	R 2 450	R 650	R1 830	R3 500	R 2 500	R10 930
Nomgcobo Tukulula	GC Clothing Studios	R 12 000	R12 000	R13 000	R14 000	R 2 000	R53 000
Shaun Cairns	Seed2Harvest	R 12 875	R131 232	R81 829	R116 618.27	R0	R345 554.27
Loyiso Ndyebo	Food for the Soul	R 8 000	R10 000	R15 000	R9 000	R 15 000	R57 000
Taz Gous	Genesis Style	R 11 900	R9 400	R20 300	R24 000	R12 000	R77 600
TOTAL SALES		R97 407.85	R362 103.50	R168 929	R205 018.27	R84 300	R920 758.62

Sales for Year one (1 Sept 2024 to 31 August 2025

Year 1 Sept 2024 -August 2025		Total
Name and Surname	Business Name	Total
Athenkosi Gexa	Truth Gexa Designs	R 57 505
Fatima Davids	CorpChem	R 17 627
Edward Frazenburg	Werwel Furniture	R 4 000
Ricardo Jonker	Nuts for Biltong	R 48 150
Lisakhanya Gelekeja	Comfort Support	R 126 410
Kgotso Masekwameng	Kgotso's Pride	R 36 260
Vanessa Cookson	Brown Girl Kreations	R 34 076
Nomgcobo Tukulula	GC Clothing Studios	R 88 850
Shaun Cairns	Seed2Harvest	R 192 806
Loyiso Ndyebo	Food for the Soul	R 46 000
TOTAL SALES		651684

Each Hub Vendor have added an additional intern from Northlink TVET College to their business operations. Providing value added work integrated learning experience.